

## Columbia Parks and Recreation Frequently Asked Questions

Updated: April 14, 2020

### **1. Can I use Parks and Recreation facilities during the [City of Columbia's Stay at Home Order 2020-03](#)?**

All individuals currently living within the City of Columbia are ordered to stay at home or at their place of residence except as allowed in the Order through Fri., April 24, 8:00 a.m. There is an exception related to parks and trails stating: "an exception shall exist for outdoor parks and trails where no shared equipment is utilized by the patrons." Review the full Order at [CoMo.gov/coronavirus/](https://www.columbia.sc.gov/coronavirus/).

### **2. Why are you canceling and closing some facilities to the public?**

Columbia's Stay at Home Order requires that some indoor and outdoor facilities like the ARC and park playgrounds be closed. The health and safety of our patrons and employees are our top priority and in trying to support social distancing, other facilities are closed as well. For example, it's hard to participate in a basketball game without violating social distancing. We hope that by implementing these closures we're doing our part to support measures to flatten the curve and prevent the spread of COVID-19.

### **3. Are parks, trails and dog parks open?**

Yes, outdoor spaces in parks and trails are open, although the use of some park amenities is prohibited, including outdoor sports courts (basketball courts, tennis/pickleball courts, etc.), playgrounds and outdoor fitness equipment. Additionally, the west side of Cosmo Park, near the tennis courts and Steinberg Playground, is closed to vehicular traffic to allow for added park space for pedestrians and wheeled sports. Cosmo Park patrons will still be able to access the Skate Park, Bear Creek Trail and Rhett's Run on the north side of the park.

With the exception of our leash free areas, dogs being walked in a park or on an established trail shall be on a leash and reined in to within four feet of the responsible person whenever approaching or being approached by another trail user. Bring your own pet waste bag and practice "pack it in, pack it out" guidelines or place in trash receptacles.

Please observe all signs related to closures. Anyone engaging in outdoor exercise activities must follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and city guidelines and you must keep a distance of at least six feet between you and other people at all times.

### **4. Why is the west side of Cosmo Park closed to vehicular traffic and why are there one-way traffic signs posted at the Cosmo Fitness Trail and other select loop trails?**

The west side of Cosmo Park is temporarily closed during the Stay at Home Order to allow more open space for pedestrian and wheeled activities (i.e. cycling and skating). Parking lots and park roads in the closed area of Cosmo Park are now open for walking, running, skating and cycling. Park patrons are asked to walk in a clockwise direction on the Cosmo Fitness Trail to allow for appropriate social distancing. Trail

users should follow enhanced trail etiquette guidelines as noted on #5. The playgrounds and sports courts in Cosmo Park will remain closed until further notice.

**Regarding select loop trails marked with one-way, clockwise signage:** Dramatic increases in trail visitation is being recorded across the United States; an analysis of 31 trail counters for the week of March 16–22 by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) found a nationwide trail usage increase of nearly 200% from that same week in 2019, which can make maintaining a safe distance of 6 feet challenging. It's vital that people find ways to engage in physical activity during this time as the benefits of exercise to our immune systems and our mental health are significant. However, the overriding message from experts is to put safety first when out on the trail. First and foremost, self compliance with maintaining a social distance of at least 6 feet—the length experts say is effective to stop the spread of COVID-19—is critical, as is self-care.

Therefore, like many agencies across the world, the Columbia Parks and Recreation Department is implementing guidelines for one-way traffic on select loop trails located at the following parks:

1. Cosmo Recreation Area: Cosmo Fitness Trail
2. Stephens Lake Park: perimeter and lake trails
3. Albert-Oakland Park: loop trail
4. Cosmo-Bethel Park: loop trail
5. Philips Park: loop trail

Destination trails such as the MKT, Bear Creek, Hominy, Scott's Branch Trail and County House Branch remain open for two-way traffic. When using out and back trails, patrons are encouraged to walk in single file when approaching or passing and are encouraged to step completely off the trail at bottlenecks. Please sound a warning as you begin to pass and remember the trail adage of "keep right/pass left." Review expanded trail etiquette guidelines in #5.

## **5. How do I maintain social distancing and COVID-19 safety guidelines in the parks or on the trails?**

Adhere to the following guidelines when visiting parks and trails:

- Do not use parks or trails if you are exhibiting symptoms related to COVID-19 such as fever, coughing and/or trouble breathing.
- Prepare for your trip by using home restroom facilities, packing a water bottle, hand sanitizer, etc. before you leave your house.
- Follow CDC's guidance on personal hygiene prior to and while on trails, including washing hands and coughing/sneezing into your elbow.
- If parking lots are full, please do not park along roadsides or in other undesignated areas. Please choose a different area to walk or return when parking is available. Parking overflowing onto nearby streets creates tensions with neighbors who may seek to have the outdoor areas closed.

- Consider avoiding the most popular places to walk (i.e. Stephens Lake Park and the MKT Trail) and use this opportunity to explore trails and areas that are not as well known. Visit our website for trail information: <https://www.como.gov/parksandrec/trail/>. Follow our Facebook page for trail highlights at <https://www.facebook.com/ComoParksandRec/>. Review #17 for suggested lesser-known parking lots and trails.
- Observe at all times CDC's minimum recommended physical distancing of 6 feet from other people. Practice it and know what it looks like. Keep it as you transition from your vehicle and as you walk, bike or hike. Walk behind or farther ahead. Avoid walking side by side. Walk single file when passing and approaching other trail users.
- When necessary, step completely off the trail to allow other trail users to safely pass. When chatting with other trail users, stand on the same side of the trail adhering to social distancing guidelines.
- Warn others as you pass by calling out "on your left" or ringing a bike bell.
- Follow social distancing guidelines in parking lots and pinch points (access trails, bridges and intersections). Avoid lingering on trail bridges and in parking lots.
- Be aware of high touch points like handles, gates and pet waste bag dispensers.
- Practice "pack it in, pack it out" standards related to all waste products. Bring pet waste bags from home. Leaving no trash behind helps protect park staff and other park and trail users.
- Go out early or later in the day to avoid crowds.
- Do not engage in sport activities utilizing shared equipment with anyone outside of your family unit.
- Exercise an extreme level of social and personal responsibility when visiting parks and trails.
- Adhere to all park amenity and trail signs regarding closures or one-way traffic where noted on park loop trails.

## **6. Are City golf courses, Lake of the Woods and L.A. Nickell, closed?**

L.A. Nickell and Lake of the Woods golf courses will reopen Friday, April 17 at 8 a.m. The reopening of the golf courses does NOT mean that the City of Columbia is easing on social distancing guidelines or the Stay at Home Order currently in place. Parks and Recreation is implementing strict measures to ensure the safety of staff and golfers. Please note these changes in golf course operations at this time:

- The clubhouses at both courses will be closed. Instead, temporary walk-up windows have been installed at each clubhouse to minimize contact between the staff attendant and golfer.
- Golfers are encouraged to pay for their tee time online prior to arrival, or payment can be accepted at the walk-up window. Credit card payment is preferred but cash will be accepted.
- Golf carts will not be rented. Golfers are encouraged to walk the course. Personal golf carts will be allowed with only one golfer per cart. Only immediate family members in the same household will be allowed to be a passenger in private carts.

- Tee times will be available daily, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., with the courses set to close by 7 p.m. Tee times will be kept 18 minutes apart to maintain distance between golfers.
- There will be no water coolers on the course, concession operations, nor access to clubhouse or course restrooms. Two portable toilets will be set at each course near the clubhouses.
- Golfers will be allowed to bring their own food and beverage; however, the City's liquor license does not allow for personal alcoholic beverages. Trash cans will be limited on the course, so golfers are encouraged to practice a "pack it in, pack it out" policy.
- Devices have been placed in the cup to stop the ball from entering the cup. Golfers will not be allowed to remove the flagstick in each hole. Ball washers and bunker rakes have been removed.
- The driving range at Lake of the Woods will be open as well (the L.A. Nickell driving range remains closed for renovations). Clubhouse staff will sanitize baskets after each use. Golf balls are picked up mechanically and placed directly into a ball washing machine, so there is no contact.
- Golfers should arrive no more than 10 minutes before their tee time. After their round is complete, golfers should promptly leave the course. Groups will not be allowed to gather outside the clubhouse or in the parking lots.
- To remain in compliance with the current Stay at Home Order restricting crowd size, there will be no tournaments until further notice.
- Tee times may be made online at [golfcolumbiamo.com](http://golfcolumbiamo.com) or by phone, starting April 17, at 573.499.GOLF (4653).

### **7. Are disc golf courses open at Harmony Bends at Strawn Park, Albert-Oakland Park and Indian Hills Park?**

Disc golf is an individual sport that can be played during this restricted social time. Friendly reminders: practice social distancing if playing with a friend, wash hands before and after play, and avoid touching the basket when retrieving your personal disc.

### **8. Can my kids play on playgrounds in public or private parks?**

No. As stated in Order 2020-03, playgrounds (including children's play structures in public or private parks) are closed.

### **9. Can I play tennis, pickleball or basketball at any park?**

No. All sports courts and fields are closed for individual or household play. Many of the national governing bodies of these sports have supported the Stay at Home orders and request that all users take a break from these games.

### **10. Can I meet up with my friends and play a sport?**

No, avoid all group sports. This includes basketball, cricket, football, baseball, softball, frisbee, and any other team or contact sport with shared equipment.

**11. What kind of activities can I do in the park?**

Stay at Home Order 2020-03 allows for outdoor exercise activities, such as walking, hiking, jogging, walking the dog, or cycling where no shared equipment is utilized by patrons. Maintaining a social distance guideline of six feet is required.

**12. Are you still conducting park and trail maintenance?**

Yes. Contact us at 573.874.7201 or [parksandrec@CoMo.gov](mailto:parksandrec@CoMo.gov) for park or trail maintenance needs.

**13. Will I get a refund for programs and classes for which I have registered if they fall within Stay at Home Order 2020-03 Dates?**

Yes, we are issuing refunds for facility reservations, programs and classes scheduled through the dates identified in the Stay at Home Order 2020-03, March 25 – April 24, 8 a.m. Refunds will be prorated as necessary. Facility rental reservations can also be transferred to another date without penalty. Refunds via credit card can take up to 7 business days. Payments made via check or cash can take up to 3 weeks by mail. We recommend you hold a credit on your account and reschedule instead. For more information, contact our office at 573.874.7460 or [parksandrec@CoMo.gov](mailto:parksandrec@CoMo.gov). We will reevaluate should Stay at Home Order 2020-03 be extended.

**14. Are private events canceled in City parks and facilities?**

Yes, all private events are canceled to adhere to Stay at Home Order 2020-03 effective Wed., March 25 through Fri., April 24 at 8 a.m.

**15. How can I find out the status of a Parks and Recreation event, program or facility closure status?** Information related to the COVID-19 pandemic is fluid and evolving. Citizens should consult the [City of Columbia's Coronavirus COVID-19 Official Information](#) webpage for updates related to [Closures and Cancellations](#).

**16. What should I do if I see activity in a park or trail that I think violates Stay at Home Order 2020-03?**

First, use good judgment. Family situations vary and there are “non-traditional” groups of people (i.e. group residential care facilities, campus fraternity houses, etc.) living together during this virus. If you feel the need to share helpful information do so by contacting Columbia Parks and Recreation at 573.874.7460 or [parksandrec@CoMo.gov](mailto:parksandrec@CoMo.gov) or contact the Columbia Police Department's non-emergency phone number at 573.442.6131 or 311.

**17. What parking lots and trail locations do you suggest I visit to avoid crowds during Stay at Home Order 2020-03?**

In order to keep parks and trails open we need everyone to spread out away from the MKT Trail and trails at Stephens Lake Park. While we can't guarantee space at any parking lot, below are suggestions for lesser-known trailheads to access multi-use, destination trails and community park loop trails. For maps, mileage and other details visit <https://www.como.gov/parksandrec/trail/>

1. **Bear Creek Trail Trailheads:** Cosmo Recreation Area, Creasy Springs Rd., Albert Oakland Park off either Blue Ridge Rd or Oakland Gravel Rd.
2. **Scott's Branch Trail:** Bonnie View Nature Sanctuary also provides access to the Prairie Education Trail and 0.9-mile nature trail.
3. **County House Branch Trail:** Twin Lakes Recreation Area (also access to the pedestrian only trails at Forum Nature Area and the MKT Trail)
4. **Hominy Creek Trail:** cyclists can park and ride from the far southeast parking lot at Stephens Lake Park.
5. **Hinkson Creek/MU Rec Trails:** Martin Luther King Jr./Stadium Blvd Trailhead, walk southwest on the MKT and access the Hinkson Creek Trail/MU Rec Trail near mile marker 6.75
6. **Cosmo Recreation Area,** 1.25-mile asphalt Fitness Trail, access to the Bear Creek Trail, Rhett's Run and Cosmo Nature Trail. Note: we have closed the southwest corner of Cosmo to vehicle traffic to allow more space for pedestrians and wheeled activities (see #4)
7. **Philips Park,** 1.4-mile gravel loop trail
8. **Cosmo-Bethel Park,** .5-mile concrete loop trail, access available from two parking lots
9. **Albert-Oakland Park,** 1-mile concrete outer loop trail, also access to the Bear Creek Trail